

**State Representative Jim Townsend**  
**Testimony in Support of H.B. 4309**  
**Legislation to Establish a Regional Transit Authority in Southeast Michigan**  
**Before the House Committee on Transportation**  
**September 27, 2012**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, I want to thank you for holding this hearing to discuss legislation to establish a Regional Transit Authority in southeast Michigan. I am pleased to be working on this bi-partisan legislation with Governor Snyder as well as numerous colleagues, regional stakeholders, business leaders, local government officials and tireless advocates for mass transit in southeast Michigan. In particular, I want to thank Senator Casperson for his leadership in sponsoring the Senate version of the bill and I want to acknowledge the House cosponsors, Representatives Lesia Liss, Wayne Schmidt and Rick Olson, who serve on this committee.

House Bill 4309 would create a new regional transit authority in southeast Michigan that includes Wayne, Oakland, Macomb and Washtenaw Counties and the City of Detroit. The authority would be governed by a ten member board including one representative of the Governor who would be non-voting, two each from Macomb, Oakland and Washtenaw Counties, two from Wayne County, one of which must be from the City of Detroit, and one appointed by the Mayor of Detroit.

The new authority would have wide powers to plan and operate transit services in the region. The authority would specifically be empowered to develop a "rolling rapid transit system" along Woodward Avenue connecting Detroit and Pontiac, Gratiot Avenue and a route connecting Troy and Mt. Clemens as well as a route connecting Ann Arbor and Detroit. Rather than dissolve existing local public transit agencies, this legislation creates an authority empowered to coordinate and rationalize transit service and receive state and federal funds. This last point is essential because the federal government has made it clear that creation of a regional transit authority is a prerequisite for large-scale federal investments in mass transit in southeast Michigan.

Without federal funding and support, efforts to develop mass transit, including public-private partnerships like the M1 project, cannot move forward. The federal government, like any investor, is looking to minimize risk and ensure long-term viability of its investments. Until southeast Michigan comes together under a regional transit authority, that level of risk will be too high for Washington and many others.

This morning, you will hear from a large and diverse group of people who believe as I do that transportation is destiny. The decisions we make, the strategies we follow, the money we spend on transportation have a profound influence on the shape of our communities, our quality of life and our ability to compete in the global economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. That is why the voices you will hear today have been so dedicated to finally bringing a regional transit authority to southeast Michigan.

I would like to leave you with a couple of statistics that demonstrate the regional nature of our economy and the importance of providing cost-effective transportation to our people. The Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) tells us that 80% of the residents of the region commute outside of their home towns to earn a living. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there are 135,979 zero-vehicle households in southeast Michigan and 52% of them are in the suburbs. The lack of adequate, efficient transit service is as much a suburban issue as it is an urban concern. Southeast Michigan, like every other Michigan metro, is a regional pool of talent, jobs and tax base and it is high time that we started connecting our communities and giving our people attractive, reliable choices for how to get around.

Mr. Chairman, I represent a district where you can walk down the street and are as likely to hear conservative viewpoints being expressed as liberal, but there is one thing that every parent or grandparent I talk to can agree on: you should not have to hit the highway to see your kids. The people of southeast Michigan are sick of exporting their college-educated kids to thriving metros in other states that have nothing southeast Michigan can't offer except one thing: mass transit.

After forty years and twenty-three attempts, with your input and help we will be able to tell our grandchildren that 24 was the charm; that we finally came together around a vision for a regional transit system that eliminates waste and duplication and provides an attractive environment for knowledge workers and entrepreneurs. And if we do that there's a much better chance that you won't have to leave town to tell your grandchild that story. Thank you.

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## **House Bill 5309**

**Sponsors:** Jim Townsend - (primary), Rick Olson, Andrew J. Kandrevas, Brandon Dillon, Vicki Barnett, Matt Lori, Ellen Cogen Lipton, Marilyn Lane, Lesia Liss, Charles Brunner, Phil Cavanagh, Thomas Stallworth, David Rutledge, Wayne A. Schmidt, Bob Constan, Dian Slavens, Fred Durhal, Jr., Timothy Bledsoe, Jon Switalski

## **House Bill 5309**

### **Southeast Michigan Regional Transit Authority Act**

Some highlights of the bill:

- It creates a new regional transit authority in southeast Michigan. The authority would include Wayne, Oakland, Macomb and Washtenaw Counties and could include additional counties if those counties petitioned the authority to join.
- The authority would be governed by a ten member board including one representative of the Governor, 2 each from Macomb, Oakland and Washtenaw Counties, 2 from Wayne County, one of which must be from Detroit, and 1 appointed by the Mayor of Detroit.
- The members of the board would have to be a resident and registered voter in the jurisdiction they are appointed to represent.
- The members of the board would have to have "substantial business, financial, or professional experience relevant to the operation of a corporation or public transit system".
- The members of the board may not be elected officials or an employee of the county or city appointing the member or an employee of a public transit provider operating in the region.
- The new authority would have wide powers to plan and operate transit services in the region and would be required to meet at least once a quarter.
- Among those powers, it would have the ability to propose a special assessment on property taxes and also receive the proceeds of a regional registration fee. Both of which would have to be approved by local voters in the entire transit region.
- The authority would specifically be empowered to develop a "rolling rapid transit system" along Woodward Avenue, Gratiot Avenue and a route connecting Troy and Mt. Clemens as well as a route connecting Ann Arbor and Detroit.
- A Citizens' Advisory Committee and a Public Transit Provider Advisory Council will be created to give input to the Authority Board.
- It would allow the Authority to withhold up to 5% of state capital and operating assistance funding in a public transit facility fails to comply with the coordination directive issued by the Authority.
- It requires 85% of the money raised in each jurisdiction through the special assessment or registration fee to be returned to that jurisdiction.